

MY THOUGHTS ON THE AKITA DOG

By Naoto Kajiwara

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as translated by Tatsuo Kimura

GUIDELINES TO THE ENJOYMENT OF THE AKITA DOG: A DISCUSSION OF THE AKITA DOG STANDARD

Raising Akita dogs or attending Akita dog shows without an adequate knowledge of the true qualities of the Akita makes it difficult for one to appreciate the good and bad qualities, as well as leaving some doubts in one's mind. Therefore, one should become well acquainted with the Akita dog Standard in order to appreciate the true Akita dog.

This is true of any species which calls for a prescribed standard for proper identification. Each of the Akita dog clubs such as the Akitainu Hozonkai (Akiho), Nippon-ken Hozonkai (Nippo) and Akita-ken Kyokai (Akikyo) has an Akita Standard. It is reported that Nippo was the first club to write the Japanese dog Standard which includes the Akita dog. The Standard of the three dog clubs were very identical in the beginning. However, each Standard has been gradually revised so that some distinguishing characteristics with minor differences have become noticeable. In general, the Nippo Standard is brief, the Akikyo Standard is rather lengthy, while the Akiho Standard is somewhere between the two foregoing Standards. All of the Standards are written in abstract terms, which probably makes it very difficult for the beginner to fully comprehend some of the passages. Nevertheless, a dog standard points out the good and bad characteristics as a guide for the breeders and judges in the show ring.

Although there may be some minor differences in the Standards of the three dog clubs, the basic differences are not great, and are essentially identical. Therefore, it may not be necessary to discuss each Standard separately. I shall discuss the Akiho Standard which I believe is moderate in length, and with which I have been acquainted for over twenty years.

THE AKITA DOG STANDARD OF THE AKITA-INU HOZONKAI (AKIHO) ESSENTIAL QUALITIES AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS (CHARACTER)

An Akita dog is calm, stately and possesses the character of a strong will and courage. He is loyal and obedient with no gaudiness. There is dignity, keenness, substance and agility.

APPEARANCE

There is a balance of structure with well-developed muscles, tendons and ligaments. The skin has no looseness. The sexual characteristics of the male are clearly distinguishable from the female. The ratio of height to length in the male is 100:110, while the female has slightly longer length in relation to the height. The male is 66.7 cm (2 shaku plus 2 sun, approximately 26.2 inches)* tall, while the female is 60.6 cm (2 shaku, approximately 23.8 inches)* tall with plus or minus 3.02 cm (1 sun, approximately 1.2 inches)* allowable for both male and female. The ratio of the height to the depth of the chest is approximately 2:1.

HEAD

The skull is large. The top of the head is almost flat. The forehead is wide with no wrinkles, with a definite crease and proper amount of stop. The cheeks are full and well-developed.

NECK

The neck is thick and powerful, with no loose skin, and at the proper angle when in the standing position.

EARS

The ears are rather small, thick, triangular shaped with the proper amount of forward angulation. They are erect with adequate distance between them.

EYES

The eyes are somewhat triangular-shaped and deeply set. The outer canthi are slightly raised, the irises are of dark brown color. There is a proper amount of space between the eyes.

MUZZLE AND NOSE

The bridge of the nose is straight, the muzzle is full. The base of the mouth is wide, and the nose is not snipy. The nostrils are tight and the lips are tightly drawn.

TEETH

The teeth are powerful with proper bite.

CHEST AND ABDOMEN

The chest is deep. The rib cage is full. The front chest is well developed. The abdomen is moderately tucked up.

BACK AND HIPS

The backline is straight and the hips are powerful.

FORELEGS

The forelegs have proper angulation with the shoulders and are well developed. The elbow joints are strong. The forelegs are straight, muscular and powerful. The pasterns are slightly angulated, The paws are round, large, thick, and have firm grips.

HIND LEGS

The hind legs are well developed, powerful and sturdy. The hocks have the proper angulation and are springy. The paws are thick and have firm grips.

TAIL

The tail is thick and tightly curled. The tip of the tail nearly touches the hock. The types of curl are the left curl, curl directly over the back and the double curl.

COAT

The outer coat is coarse while the undercoat is fluffy. The coat at the withers and rump are slightly longer, while the tail has the longest coat.

COAT COLORS

White, black, red. goma (sesame), brindle (tiger stripes), and pinto.

MINOR FAULTS

1. Acquired injuries and poor nutritional status.
2. Coat color unbecoming to an Akita dog.
3. Very light irises (eyes) not matching the coat color.
4. Missing or irregular tooth or teeth. Edge-to-edge bite.
5. Spot(s) on the tongue.
6. Undesirable disposition such as shyness, frivolity or ferociousness.
7. Other poor characteristics of an Akita dog.

DISQUALIFICATIONS

1. Droopy ears since birth.
2. Uncurled tail since birth.
3. Excessively short, or long coat since birth.
4. Undershot and overshot jaws with improper bite.

5. Color of nose not matching the color of coat (reddish nose is acceptable with white coat).
6. Undescended testicle or testicles.
7. Other defects lacking the characteristics of an Akita dog

Some of the foregoing terminologies are not commonly used and may be very difficult for some readers to understand their meanings.

However, the text should become more gradually comprehensible as one gains experience after many years of dog breeding and comes to a better understanding of the Akita dog. I shall now attempt to do a simplified explanation of the Standard in its regular sequence.

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS (CHARACTER)

The term "essential qualities" is difficult to describe. The sentence stating that "An Akita dog is calm, stately and possesses the character of a strong will and courage," seems to denote stateliness. The characters of calmness and fearlessness are the essentials for this stateliness. "He is loyal, obedient with no gaudiness" emphasizes the absence of gaudiness. The qualities of being obedient, faithful and not being gaudy are deemed as necessary characteristics in giving rise to the appearance of simplicity in the Akita dog. Within this lack of gaudiness is the "dignity, keenness, substance and agility." This last sentence points to the deportment of the Akita dog. Keenness refers to the sensitive senses of vision, hearing and smell. The proper functions of these senses aid the Akita dog to be agile as well as being bold in his movements.

Furthermore, the term "essential qualities" refers to the original temperament and character which have been passed down from generation to generation.

Thus, in referring to the Akita dog, it may be proper to assume that the "essential qualities" were passed down from generation to generation from the hunting dog era. During the guard dog era, the Akita dog appeared stately to the stranger, and loyal with no gaudiness to the owner. During the fighting dog era, the Akita dog acquired the large build and nimbleness of movement which was important in meeting the opponents. The temperament and physical constitution passed down from ancient times through the natural habitat and other environmental conditions became the Akita dog's unique "essential qualities."

APPEARANCE

Appearance refers to the facial shape and general form. "There is a balance of structure with well-developed muscles, tendons and ligaments. The skin has no looseness. The sexual characteristics of the male are clearly distinguishable from the female." The various anatomical parts of the dog must be in balance to each other. The skeletal system is strong and solid. The muscles, tendons and blood vessels are well developed through disciplinary training, while the skin is tight with no looseness.

The male appears masculine, while the female appears feminine, resulting in a beautifully balanced Akita dog. There is the beauty of vigorous health from proper training.

However, in reality, the appearance seems to be largely dependent on the coat quality such as the color tone, the coat substance and the standing of the coat. A dog will not look magnificent no matter how great the construction, if the coat quality was very poor. In order to have a good appearance, there must be good body construction, proper arrangement of the coat and a vigorous disposition. There must also be proper angulation of the neck, sturdy body, a properly curled tail with symmetrical powerful fore and hind limbs.

"The ratio of height to length in the male is 100:110, while the female has a slightly longer length in relation to the height."

It is important to have a proper ratio between the body length and the height, in order to have a proper balance. However, actual measurements of male dogs with good form and male-like appearance show that the majority have a ratio of 100:105.

The slightly longer length in relation to the height stipulated for the female is based on the physiological factor of reproduction and manifestation of the sexual characteristics. Akiho stipulates that the height of the male is 2 shaku plus 2 sun plus or minus 1 sun (approximately 25 to 27.4 inches). Nippo stipulates 2 shaku plus 1 sun to 2 shaku plus 3 sun. (approximately 25.2 to 27.6 inches), while Akikyo stipulates 2 shaku plus 1 sun (approximately 25.2 inches) or more. Each club stipulates that the female is about 2 shaku (.24 inches). They all stipulate that the ratio of the height of the depth of the chest is 2:1.

"The skull is large. The top of the head is almost flat." The head of the Akita dog is much larger proportionally than those of other dogs. The top of the head between the ears is somewhat flat and must not be pointed up or rounded. However, there are several types of head seen on the Akita dog. There are those with round triangular-like appearance, those with a prominence in the occipital region and various other shapes at the top of the head due probably due to the different locations of the ear bases.

"The forehead is wide with no wrinkles, with a definite crease and proper amount of stop. The cheeks are full and well-developed." The forehead is wide with a definite crease running from the forehead to the stop. There is a proper amount of stop between the forehead and nose. The cheeks are full. There must be no wrinkles on the forehead or near the outside corners of the eyes. However, one often sees many forms of forehead.

There is the round forehead or the forehead with a marked rise in the center. There is also the flat forehead like that of a cow. Ideally the head bone should be wide with a very slight bulge. The crease and stop are also very important parts of the Akita dog's face. The stop must not be too shallow or too deep. The very shallow stop is called "non-stop", and does not harmonize with the majestic features, while a stop that is too deep causes the facial features to become narrow with precipitous features.

In theory the wilder the animal, the shallower is the stop, while the domesticated animals begin to take on a deeper stop. However, in the Akita dog, a proper amount of stop is desirable. The fullness of the cheeky are developed from the bite. The addition of this to the wide forehead results in the unique appearance of the Akita dog.

Next, I would like to comment on the wrinkles of the face. If one were to exclude the young dogs whose foreheads have not yet fully developed, one rarely sees any wrinkles on the foreheads of the Akita dogs of today. The Akita dogs between the 20th and 30th years of Showa (1945 to 1955), on the other hand, developed wrinkles on the face with looseness of the skin as they matured, while these were not too evident in the puppies of that period.

According to some of the dog literature during the Taisho Period (1912 to 1925), when the so-called "improved dogs" or the "New Akita Dogs" were prevalent, the weird wrinkles on the face were widely accepted as being desirable, and some people went as far as stating that wrinkles on the face added to the stateliness of the Akita dog. Setting aside the fact that this was the period when the Akita dog was crossbred to produce fighting dogs, the Akita dog should not have any wrinkles on the facial region. In general, wrinkles indicate looseness of the skin, and is not permissible as a part of dignity and character of the Akita dog.

NECK

"The neck is thick and powerful, with no loose skin, and at the proper angle when in the standing position." The neck must be thick, full and powerful. It must not appear thin or have any looseness of the skin. The proper angle of the neck is approximately 45 degrees when the dog is in the normal standing position. The Akita dog's neck must be able to maintain the exceptionally large head. In order to capture any game or to swing the opponents when holding on to them during a battle, the neck must be thick and powerful. Also, as a show dog, the neck must be in balance with the massive head. Otherwise the appearance of fullness and powerfulness of the neck will be lacking. The proper angulation of the neck adds to the balance of the body as a whole.

If the angulation is too high, there is an unnatural appearance with the loss of keenness in relation to the body. If the angulation is too low, there is a lack of appeal and vigor.

EARS

"The ears are rather small, thick, triangular shaped with the proper amount of forward angulation. They are erect with adequate distance between them." The terms "proper amount" and "adequate" used in the foregoing paragraph are very vague and difficult to explain, but the emphasis is probably on the balance between the head regions and the face. There is a reason for having relatively small ears in the mature dog. Since the ears of the puppy are usually proportionately large, a puppy with small ears may be of some concern because many of these ears do not attain the adequate height when they reach maturity. The thickness or thinness of the ears do not seem to be of any great significance from a functional standpoint, but as a show dog, the thick ears are more pleasing to the eyes as well as being in balance with other parts of the body, providing that it does not impart a feeling of dullness. Thin ears seem to impart a nervous temperament and lacking the feeling of composure and dignity. There are many varieties of triangular shaped ears such as the "bamboo ears" which are thin and close together at the base, then there are "baggy ears" in which the outer edges fold toward the center. There are also ears where the inner edges are vertical. Even the properly shaped ears are somewhat longer with unequal sides at times.

"They are erect with adequate distance between them." This refers to the setting of the ears which means that the ears are standing erect as if they were thrust into the head. Thus the ear lines must be straight. When referring to the proper forward angulation of the ear, there should be a slight forward angulation in relation to a line extended upward from the posterior neck line. Ears standing too high when seen from the side view lacks the desirable sharpness, while ears that stand too low imports a feeling of heaviness.

The distance between the ears should be seen from the frontal view. The ears have tips that are pointed and a wide base. The proper distance between the ears may be determined by drawing a vertical line from the inner point of attachment of the ears.

This line should pass through, the center of the dog's eyes. This should result in a proper width of the ears. Ears that are too wide are called "ornamental ears", while those ears with their inner point of attachment in line with the pointed ear tips are called "approaching ears." Ears of proper width have a vertical line from the ear tip pass through the middle of the base of the ear.

Thus, the ears of an Akita dog not only adds to the beauty of its outward appearance, but its shape expresses the quality and strength of the dog's mentality.

EYES

It is said that the eyes are the windows of the heart, or that the eyes may speak as much as the mouth. They reveal not only the state of mind of the dog, but its proper shape and location may also add to the quality of the individual dog.

"The eyes are somewhat triangular shaped and deeply set." The somewhat triangular shape is probably due to the gathering of the inner canthi with the apices of the upper eyelids and the longer base of the scalene triangle being out on the side. However, in reality, there are arch-shaped upper and lower eyelids, resulting in circular eyes. The term "deep" infers that the eyes should not protrude because shallow eyes along with bulky ears detract from the dignity of a stately face and do not contribute to the balance.

"The outer canthi are slightly raised, the irises are of dark brown color." This means the outer canthi, in relation to the lower eyelids, are slightly higher than the inner canthi, resulting in a slanted shape. The raised outer margins of the eyes are referred to as slanting eyes. However, if the eyes are too slanted, the eyes assume a stern look, while the lack of slanting results in lack of power in the eyes. as well as departing from the true character of the dog. The dark brown irises may be similar to the reddish orange mixed with black.

"There is a proper amount of space between the eyes." This refers to the location of the eyes on the face, which varies from individual to individual, but again, it is referring to the balance of the dog. Proper distance between the eyes enhances dignity, while those eyes which are too close give an impression of sternness or nervousness. Eyes which are too far apart give a loose expression. The eyes of the Akita dogs of today have markedly improved. In the past the type of eyes described in the Standard were very rare.

MUZZLE AND NOSE

"The bridge of the nose is straight, the muzzle is full. The base of the mouth is wide, and the nose is not snipy." This means that the line extending forward from the stop toward the nose must be straight from the side view. However, one also often sees the bridge of the nose that is either convex or concave. A line extending from the top of the head to the forehead should be parallel with the line extending from the stop to the nose. It is difficult to have a proper face if these lines either intersect or broaden out. The muzzle must taper gradually from the cheeks to the tip of the mouth. The base must be broad and the tip must not be snipy. The area between the cheeks and the muzzle must be broad and tight.

It must not taper acutely with the tip of the face pointed excessively. In other words, the cheeks must be broad, the muzzle must also be full in order to have a suitable shape of the face.

"The nostrils are tight and the lips are tightly drawn." The term "tight" is difficult to explain, but one may be referring to the tenseness of the nose when the dog is sniffing. The nose must also be black, shiny, moist and active. However, a red nose is allowable on the white Akita dog. The lips must be tightly drawn, that is, the upper or the lower lips must not be hanging down or loose. The lips must be drawn in a straight line. The color of the lips must also match the black color of the nose.

At the present time, there are three general classifications of muzzles. They are round, square, and triangular types. In the triangular type, even a slight looseness of the lips is easily noticeable. The square type, which is also known as the boxy type, is also frequently associated with droopiness of the lips. The round type is the most ideal and there is no looseness of the lips usually, owing to the shape, and one can often see the ideal straight line.

The face of the Akita dogs of today have markedly improved. Until the 30th year of Showa (1955), desirable Japanese dog like facial features which impart the impressions of tastefulness and majesty were indeed rare.

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GUIDELINES TO THE ENJOYMENT OF YOUR AKITA DOG: A DISCUSSION OF THE AKITA DOG STANDARD (CONTINUED)

TEETH

"The teeth are powerful with proper bite." Included in the foregoing stipulation is the correct number of teeth which is 42 altogether. There are 2 upper and 2 lower canine teeth, a total of 4 teeth; 6 upper and 6 lower incisors; 8 upper and 8 lower premolars; 4 upper molars and ; 6 lower molars. The dog not only use his teeth for chewing or food, but also as the only effective weapon for attacking and defensive purposes.

"The proper scissors bite is desired, but one also sees the overshot and undershot varieties, which are not rare. Missing or irregular teeth are regarded as minor faults. I would also like to add that the quality of the teeth, not mentioned in the Standard, is also very important. Teeth with a polished appearance are desirable.

CHEST AND ABDOMEN

"The chest is deep. The rib cage is full. The front chest is well developed. The abdomen is moderately tucked up." The chest depth probably refers to the side view, while the well developed front chest refers to the width of the chest as viewed from the front. Since the chest contains a portion of the body's vital organs, the shape is of much importance for the proper functioning of these organs. Although the Standard specifies that the ideal ratio between the height and chest depth as being 2:1 respectively, and that the chest extend to the level of the elbow, many of the recent Akita dogs seem to lack the adequate chest depth and width. One is not sure whether this is related to lack of adequate training exercises or difference in how the dogs are used.

"The rib cage must be powerful and full,"and ideally be egg shaped in crosssection. However, if it is round from a cross-sectional view, the front chest may be too wide. This may effect the attachment of the front limbs and result in a clumsy gait. The opposite extreme of this is narrow ribs with inadequate spread that could result in a flat shape with narrow elbows, and a dog with an appearance lacking endurance. Thus the standard calls for a robust well-developed chest.

"The abdomen is moderately tucked up." This refers to the belly's tuck-up in relation to the chest when seen from the side. No matter how well the belly area may be tucked up, a shallow chest will not make this evident and will give the impression of a dog with a very thin body. The Akita dog's overall appearance of a sturdy and impressive air is influenced to a great extent by the chest development and tuck up of the abdomen.

BACK AND HIPS

"The backline is straight and the hips are powerful." The back and hips are very important for transmitting the driving force of the hind legs to the front legs. A convex (roach) or concave (sway) back affects the movement of the dog so that agility is lost. A roach back inevitably effects the angle of the neck and the tail coil, resulting in a poor posture. A sway back gives the appearance of a listless animal lacking proper exercise and training.

"The hips are powerful" refers to the powerful muscles that attach the pelvic bone to the adjacent bones. A weak hip causes instability of the back, resulting in weak hind legs with poor stance. Some of these faults may be hereditary, but others may be due to

FORELEGS

"The forelegs have proper angulation with the shoulders and are well developed. The elbow joints are strong." The forelegs must support the large head, thick neck and powerful chest. Furthermore, they aid in the vital function of agile movement. The parts of the frame from top to bottom consists of the shoulder blade (scapula), the humerus radius and ulna of the forearm, the carpus and the digits, each joined in succession to each other. The correct joint angles of these bones are very important in that the quality of the frame is

largely determined by them. The outward appearance of the forelegs is dependent on the humerus, radius, ulna, pasterns and the paws. A shallow, angle between the scapula and the humerus results in "maeyori-kata" where there is frontward deviation of the shoulder blade. A faulty joint at the humerus and forearm bones results in a weak elbow joint.

"The forelegs are straight." This refers to the dog's forelegs as seen from the front. They must not be curved or have the toes pointed outward. The forelegs should be straight and muscular through proper disciplinary training. The pastern bears the impact of the body weight and must be very resilient as well as having the proper angle.

"The paws are round, large, thick and have firm grips." They should be round, large, thick with strong grips with much resilience. Splayed or rabbit feet are not desirable, especially from the standpoint of a show dog.

HIND LEGS

"The hind legs are well-developed, powerful and sturdy." The hind legs are the propulsive force in the movement of the dog. The anatomical parts of the hind leg are the hip bone, which is attached to the femur, which is attached to the tibia, and then the fibula and the tarsi. Naturally, these must also have proper angulations at the joints as in the forelegs. Externally, one would like to see a strong muscular build of these structures as a result of disciplinary training. Although the Akita dogs of today have markedly improve along this line, many Akitas of the past had improper angulation or weak joints in the hindlegs. Some of the faults were cowhocks, open hocks and weak hind legs moving close to each other. Also, a side view revealing a curved lower leg with excessive angulation detracts from the appearance of sturdiness.

"The hocks have the proper angulation and springiness." The hocks play an important part in producing the propulsive power of the hind legs, and must be structurally, sound to produce a strong and quick driving force. Excessive angulation, shallow angulation and "reverse hock" are not normal from the standpoint of mechanics. The hindlegs must also appear as large and powerful as the forelegs.

The hindlegs are important parts of the anatomy and contribute greatly to the overall appearance of the dog. The hind legs should be parallel with the forelegs when viewed from the rear. The side view should reveal a powerful stance, which adds to the overall appeal of the dog.

TAIL

"The tail is thick and tightly curled. The tip of the tail almost touches the hock." It is said that the tail of the dog functions as a rudder. It also expresses the character and beauty of the dog aesthetically. As stated in the Standard, the tail must be curled in a majestic manner. Unless the tail nearly reaches the hock, an adequate curl will not be formed, while a longer tail often leads to a loose curl which will detract from the stylish appearance.

"The types of curls are the left curl, curl directly over the back, and the double curl." The tail curls should be as specified in the Standard. However, there are variations even in the same type of curl. There are curls that are too tight, making the tail appear smaller. There is also the curled tail that drops to the side of the hip. Then there is the "droopy tail" with a very loose curl. In general, the ideal curl should be high and oval shaped. In essence, the tail should be in balance with the angle of the neck and in harmony with the rest of the body to reveal its beauty and powerful appearance. The tail curl is considered as one of the symbols of the Akita dog along with its standing ears, so that an uncurled tail is considered a point of disqualification.

COAT

"The outer coat is coarse while the undercoat is fluffy." The coat of the Akita is considered as being unique with three grades of coat. The long heavy straight coat is called the bristle coat, the coat covering the entire body is called the regular or outer coat. Beneath the outer coat is the soft luxuriant undercoat, also called the fluffy coat. A coat of good quality will reveal all three layers. The luxuriant growth of the undercoat causes the other layers to stand out, especially with the bristle coat. The coat at the withers and rump are slightly longer than in other areas. The tail coat is notably much longer and must be standing adequately. In contrast, if the undercoat is inadequate, the outer coats will not be as erect.

This condition is seen temporarily with the change of coat in dogs with a coat of good quality. Lack of either outer or undercoat can result in a coat of a uniform layer. Then there is another coat of poor quality called the soft downy hair. Extremely long or extremely short coats are reasons for disqualification.

The characteristic coat of the Akita is probably due to their origin in the northern regions where the winters are very severe. A simple way to evaluate an Akita dog's coat is to look for the clumping of the coat seen immediately after a dog shakes off the rain from his drenched coat.

COAT COLORS

There are some obvious differences in the Standards on the coat color between the three Akita dog organizations. Akiho includes white, black, red, goma (sesame), brindle (tiger striped) and pinto. Nippo includes goma (goma, white goma, red goma, black goma), red (red, light red, deep red), black, brindle, red brindle, black brindle and white. Pinto is not included. Akikyo includes red, white, goma, brindle and black, as well as variations on the foregoing colors with differences in the way of ranking.

The foregoing colors of the Akita are not as simple to visualize as written in the Standard, and in reality it becomes very difficult to evaluate the various colors. Attempts to explain or interpret are further complicated by different views held by the viewers. However, the coat color holds much sway in placing the Akita dog at the shows. A dog lacking a vivid coat color may not be placed as high in the show ring, no matter how great the facial features, beautifully balanced the body, or excellent the coat quality.

With the exception of the white coat, the Akita dog's coat color undergoes changes with growth and development. This also adds to the difficulty of judging the true coat color. In the final analysis, one should become capable of judging what he considers to be the appropriate color for each stage of growth. Needless to say, one should consider the color hue admired by the Japanese in the Akita dog that inhabited the Tohoku region from ancient times. That is, color hues that blend with the elegantly pure Japanese paintings, pristine and refined Japanese antique art objects and the simple but sturdy and strong Japanese architecture should be considered otherwise. I believe that one could not possibly come to appreciate the feeling for that simplicity without adornment called "shibusu" or "soboku" so often expressed by the Japanese.

WHITE. Pure white with some tinge of blue is considered as being the most ideal. However, some consideration is also given to those with a faint tinge of red or yellow. Although a pink nose is permitted on the white dog, the dark pigmentation the borders of the eyes and lips should be darker than the pigment of the nose. The quality of the white coat which gives rise to a feeling of purity and mysticism may be brought out only by having the various parts of the body pigment in a darker hue.

BLACK. Akitas entered as black in the dog shows, on closer inspection turn out to be either black goma or black brindle without stripes. However, it is a color that is accepted by all of the Akita dog organizations. Personally, I have yet to see a truly black Akita. A black Akita dog with a coat color similar to those ancient Japanese paintings in black and white would probably be readily noticed and highly regarded.

RED. In general, the term red includes red, crimson, scarlet, red lead, orange, etc. depending on the shade. In the Akita dog, teal-colored varieties are also considered red, including fox red, light red, yellow red, etc. There are many more names denoting red which are difficult to express in written terms. The color tone also varies with the color of the soft undercoat. A white undercoat makes a coat look lighter, while a black undercoat makes a coat look darker. Furthermore, various parts of a dog's body have different shades of light and dark which further adds to the varieties. As to the color tones which are preferable, my opinion is that one should exclude the faded and the dark heavy tones, as well as those that remind one of red rust. Any color tone that blends with colors of Japanese paintings is worthy of consideration.

More recently, fewer Akitas with black ears and black masks are seen, as well as red Akitas with streaks of black and varying shades of red. These types were very common until about ten years ago, while the Akita dogs with white masks or masks with white extending from the muzzle to above the eyes which are commonly seen today, were rare in those days. Although the reasons for the decline of the black mask are not clear, my conjecture is that increased fondness for the "hoho-boke" (faded cheek, color) which is more representative of the smaller wild animals inhabiting northern Japan may be responsible for this-trend.

GOMA. Akiho has classified it as one color, but Nippo has divided it into goma, white-goma, red goma, and black goma. White goma probably refers to the silver goma of the past. The red goma coat usually consists mostly of red with some black. The black goma coat contains more black than goma, resulting in a darker coat. There are very few Akitas with the goma coat remaining today. Until the mid 1950's, over half of the Akita dog show entries were either of red goma or black goma coats. I believe that the decline was due to the change of the goma color. Although the puppy coat color was to one's liking, the coat tended to take on a dull appearance with maturity, so that in some cases the color was associated with another breed of dog which was quite unlike an Akita dog.

However, the goma and black goma coats are included in the Standard, and the dogs with the goma coat have not disappeared completely.

It is hoped that the Akita dog with the elegant black goma coat will be preserved.

BRINDLE (TIGER STRIPES). As in the red coat, there are also many shades of brindle. They may be classified into the brindle, black brindle, red brindle and the pepper-and-salt brindle coats. The most desirable brindle colors for the Akita are probably the black or the salt-and-pepper brindles. The black brindles tend to lack the white on the muzzle, at the tips of the limbs and the tail, resulting in a heavier than desirable black color tone. The pepper-and-salt brindle has a lighter shade of black, with the muzzle and limbs having a hue as if some frost had descended upon the earth. The color quality of the red brindled coat depends upon the amount of red present, whereby a strong red color is undesirable.

Several years ago, brindles with striped patterns on the face were fairly common. This was often a point of criticism. But since there are stripes on the trunk and limbs, it seems natural that some of these would appear on the face. It would be better if these facial stripes were not so unsightly.

In any event, the distinctive feature of the brindle coat is that it expresses "soboku", a pristine simplicity and dignity in the Akita dog. This is especially true in a brindle with an outstanding coat.

PINTO (BUCHI) There are wide variations in this coat pattern. It includes those with only a thin white stripe around the neck as well as those with a pattern over the entire body. Then there are those with color limited to the head only. The pinto colors consist of red, goma, black and brindle with many variations in both color and pattern. However, pintos with harmonious color tones are indeed splendid and elegant dogs to behold. Akiho has awarded the Meiyosho to pinto dogs in the past, however, they are not valued very highly at the present time. Perhaps this may reflect the preference for Akita dogs with the quality of simple dignity without gaudiness.

MINOR FAULTS AND DISQUALIFICATIONS

In general the sections on minor faults and disqualifications appear to be self-explanatory, but there are certain passages which may not be clear to some minds. For example, under the section on minor faults, there is the sentence which states: "Coat color unbecoming to an Akita dog." There are many shades of "unbecoming" colors which may vary considerably with color preferences and interpretations of the observers. To some a dark color may be tiring, while to others a light color may be faded. These factors often add to the difficulty of coming to a uniform decision.

The section on disqualifying factors mentions "excessively long or short coat since birth." Although the written Standard is clearly defined, from my observations so far, I have not seen any dogs with short hair disqualified. In fact, in some cases, I have seen dogs with relatively short coats rated in the show ring as being desirable. On the other hand, they are rather consistent in disqualifying dogs with long coats.

Although faults on teeth are well defined, it seems that the spotted tongue is often ignored with no general agreement on the number of penalty points for this fault. These faults and disqualification points should be made clearly defined in the Standard.

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